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ABSTRACT

This 16-item questionnaire was sent to 142 selected college and university libraries in February 1987 to determine which library skills academic librarians consider desirable for undergraduate students. Questionnaires were returned by 89 respondents (62.7%). The number of respondents for each question and the titles of the resources cited in their replies are provided (as applicable) in this tally of the responses. Issues addressed by the survey questions include: (1) the most important library resources (e.g., indexes, reference works); (2) frequently used journal indexes; (3) extent of use of general encyclopedias; (4) use of newspaper indexes; (5) greatest problems encountered by freshmen in the library; (6) main purpose for using the library; and (7) search strategies (both manual and database) used by librarians. An analysis of the responses to the question on the greatest problems experienced by freshman using the library is attached, together with copies of two letters sent to the survey respondents. (CGD)

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COLUMBUS SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Beaton Library

SURVEY OF DESIRABLE SKILLS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

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1. Based on your experience working with freshmen and undergraduates in general, which library resources are most important? Please name specific indexes, reference works, etc.

N (number of respondents) = 84; in response to this question, 84 respondents cited a total of 106 resources.

47% (39) Readers Guide
39% (33) Social Science Index
36% (30) The catalog
33% (28) Statistical Abstract
33% (28) New York Times Index
29% (24) General encyclopedias
25% (21) Humanities Index
23% (19) Almanacs
23% (19) Wilson Indexes unspecified
21% (18) PAIS

2. To which single reference source do you turn most often in assisting undergraduate students? Why?

N = 71; a total of 18 resources were cited.

45% (32) The catalog and LCSH
29.5% (21) Readers Guide

Note: 70% of the respondents cited titles related to current periodicals.

3. Do undergraduates use Facts On File very often?

N = 75.

39% (29) No; 61% (46) Yes.
Yes answers: 25% yes; 23% occasionally; 9% if directed to it by librarian; 4% it's important to librarians in helping students.

4. Which journal indexes are used most frequently by undergraduates?

N = 85; 37 titles were cited.

67% (57) Social Science Index
66% (56) Readers Guide
40% (34) Humanities Index
34% (29) PAIS
26% (22) Business Periodicals Index
22% (19) Education Index
21% (18) Psychology Abstracts
18% (15) General Science Index
14% (12) Wilson Indexes unspecified
13% (11) MLA Bibliography

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5. Do undergraduates continue to use general encyclopedias? If yes, which do you recommend?

N = 84; 7 titles were cited. 95% (80) of the respondents cited continuing use of general encyclopedias by undergraduates. Recommended titles:

79% (66) Encyclopaedia Britannica
68% (57) Encyclopedia Americana
43% (36) Academic American Encyclopedia
31% (26) World Book Encyclopedia
19% (16) Colliers Encyclopedia

6. Is the New York Times Index the most frequently used newspaper index? Which others, if any, are used by undergraduates?

N = 81; 83% (67) of respondents answered yes; 15% (12) stated that there is more use of the National Newspaper Index.

In addition to the New York Times Index, a total of 13 other news indexes were cited:

47% (38) Wall Street Journal
41% (33) National Newspaper Index
23% (19) Indexes to local papers
20% (16) London Times
12% (10) Washington Post
11% (9) Newsbank
11% (9) Christian Science Monitor

7. What are the greatest problems that freshmen have in the library?

N = 87; responses were grouped into twelve problem areas. See attached sheet for a brief explanation of each area.

34% (30) Do not understand the library as an institution.
34% (30) Problems related to periodicals.
33% (29) Thinking problems.
32% (28) Fear and loathing.
32% (28) Problems related to the catalog.
29% (25) Problems related to basic skills.
23% (20) Overwhelmed by the research process.
22% (19) Problems related to the classification system.

8. In your experience, for what main purposes do undergraduates use the library?

N = 85; a total of 18 uses were cited.

71% (60) study
61% (52) research papers
47% (40) reserve reading
39% (33) short-term course related assignments
33% (28) socialization ("face time")

9. Do you find that undergraduates are assigned analytical papers rather than research papers? If yes, what type of resources do students use for these?

This question was abandoned as a failure of logic on my part: papers requiring analysis of a text without library research would not be known by librarians. In speaking with our alumnae, I have seen a pattern of text analysis without library use, particularly in the freshmen year. This has caused me to wonder if our extensive program of bibliographic instruction is a waste.

10. Please describe the type of search strategy that you use with undergraduates. If you do not use the concept of a search strategy, describe the organization of your instruction.

N = 82.

59% (48) Described a 3 to 4 step process: survey articles, catalog, periodical indexes, other sources (reference works, bibliographies, goverment documents.)
An additional 16% (13) described their process as general to particular or simple to complex, without further specification; it is possible that this is essentially the same answer stated in another way.

22% (18) Individual attention; method varies with the subject, the course, or the length of the paper.

2% (2) Deductive method: trace references from bibliographies or suggested reading lists.

1% (1) Chronological method: recent to historical materials.

11. Do you expect entering students to be familiar with data base searching? Which vendor and databases are most useful in working with undergraduates?

N = 83; 99% (82) do not expect familiarity with data base searching.

Of the 53 respondents who cited a vendor, 74% (39) cited DIALOG; 38% (20) cited BRS or BRS After Dark; 26% (14) cited Wilsonline.

12. What are your expectations (or desires) regarding freshmen abilities to use a library?

N = 87; 25 separate skills were defined as expected or desired.

61% (53) Understand the purpose and use of a periodical index, including the parts of a citation.
57% (50) Understand the purpose and use of the catalog, including how to read the parts of a card or an on-line citation.
39% (34) Display certain positive attitudes such as an open mind, curiosity, persistance, and a desire to learn. 29% (25) of the 87 respondents wished that freshmen would display a willingness to ask for help before reaching the desperation level.
18% (16) Understand the concept of controlled vocabulary.
17% (15) Expect very little or nothing.
16% (14) Understand the concept of a classification system and its relation to the location of books on the shelves.
15% (13) Know how to use some basic reference sources.
14% (12) Be able to formulate a search strategy.
14% (12) Recognize various types of information sources.

13. How are your expectations communicated to secondary school librarians?

N = 83.

66% (55) Expectations are not communicated.
17% (14) Through tours and classes for high school students; process is initiated by the high school teacher.
15% (12) This communication should be the responsibility of state or national professional organizations.
12% (10) Through personal contacts (visits, lectures, meetings) with local high school librarians.

14. 1) Have you or any of the reference staff been on tours of area high school libraries? 2) Do local secondary librarians visit your facility?

1) N = 80. 79% (63) No; 16% (13) Yes; 5% (4) As a parent or for a meeting.
2) N = 81. 55% (45) No; 41% (33) Yes; 4% (3) Do not know.

15. Do you have a formal course in library instruction for freshmen? If yes, please describe it.

N = 85.

37% (31) No formal program for freshmen.
21% (18) Yes, as a component of a required English or writing course for freshmen.
13% (11) Yes, as an optional component of a freshman English class; upon instructor's request.
13% (11) Not specifically for freshmen, but as course-related instruction in various courses.
11% (9) Optional orientation programs.
7% (6) A credit course taken primarily by sophomores up.
6% (5) Yes, as part of a "freshmen studies," "freshmen seminar," "introduction to university life" course.

16. Is your catalog on-line or is it a card catalog?

N = 82.

60% (49) On-line, on-line + frozen card catalog, on-line soon (in conversion process or by a specified date.)
40% (33) Card catalog or card + COM.

Please address questions or comments to:

Susan Altan
Beaton Library
Columbus School for Girls
56 South Columbia Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43209

GREATEST PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY FRESHMEN IN USING THE LIBRARY

34% Do not understand the library as an institution.

Freshmen have no concept of library organization, or of the distinction between primary / secondary or popular / scholarly sources. They also have no concept of the vast array of resources, they are unaccustomed to using libraries, are unaware of the librarian as a resource, and are unaware of their own lack of knowledge.

34% Problems related to periodicals.

Freshmen cannot read citations, cannot identify or locate periodicals dispersed throughout the collection, and cannot use a union list of serials.

33% Thinking problems.

Freshmen have no idea how to start; they cannot conceptualize a topic, formulate a research problem, narrow a topic, ask an appropriate question, or see the relevance of a resource to a topic.

32% Fear and loathing.

Freshmen are bewildered by the size and complexity of both the physical building and the collection. They feel dumb, are afraid or too embarrassed to ask questions, and cannot read directional maps.

32% Problems related to the catalog.

Freshmen lack card reading skills, have difficulties understanding subject headings, and have particular problems with LCSH and the concept of controlled vocabulary.

Continued on next page

29% Problems related to basic skills.

Freshmen lack familiarity with basic skills, reference sources, and the organiation of information into disciplines. They do not recognize the difference between a book and a journal, and cannot articulate a simple search strategy.

23% Overwhelmed by the research process.

Freshmen lack persistence, follow-through and flexibility. They want everything in one source and give up after the first try. They procrastinate and find research too time consuming.

22% Problems related to the classification system.

Freshmen do not understand the Library of Congress system, cannot read LC call numbers, and cannot locate items on the shelves.

Columbus School for Girls

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PATRICIA T. HAYOT
Headmistress

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Beaton Library

February 6, 1987

Dear University or College Librarian,

The Ohio Library Association, the Ohio Educational Library Media Association, and the Academic Library Association of Ohio recently sponsored a joint task force on library instruction, specifically on the transition from high school to college. This report, Primed for Success, was submitted to the Ohio Library Association in June, 1986.

In reading this report, I was struck, as a college-preparatory school librarian, by the fact that no standards seem to exist that would define preparation in library use and research skills for college-bound students.

A literature survey to 1979 has revealed a high interest in this topic as evidenced by the Eleventh Annual Library Instruction Conference, Eastern Michigan University, May, 1981, and by numerous papers which affirm the need for such preparation, but which do so in very broad terms. The use of reference books, for example, is often cited as a valuable skill, but specific tools that would be of use to freshmen or undergraduates are not enumerated.

In reviewing the literature, I also noticed that, in addition to the lack of universal standards, there were no published reports of surveys conducted to ascertain the actual skills needed by undergraduates, particularly freshmen.

In an effort to verify that the library research skills which comprise our instruction program are actually those that college librarians would regard as essential, I have enclosed a questionnaire with this letter. This survey is being sent to librarians in colleges and universities most often attended by our graduates or which are known to have especially strong undergraduate bibliographic instruction programs.

I would appreciate it very much if you would direct this letter and questionnaire to a librarian who is experienced in working with undergraduate students and who would enjoy sharing some of that expertise with a secondary school colleague.

I have provided a stamped, addressed envelope for your convenience and will be happy to send a summary of the results of this survey to you.

Sincerely yours,

Susan Altan

Susan Altan, Senior Librarian

Columbus School for Girls

56 SOUTH COLUMBIA AVENUE
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PATRICIA T. HAYOT
Headmistress

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Beaton Library

April 14, 1988

Dear Academic Librarian,

Last spring, you were kind enough to spend some time responding to a questionnaire concerning the use of college libraries by undergraduates, particularly by freshmen.

A total of 142 questionnaires were sent to the libraries of those colleges and universities most often attended by our graduates or which are known to have especially strong bibliographic instruction programs. Eighty-nine responses were received, which is a return rate of 62.7%. This very high return once again demonstrates the unusual professional dedication of librarians and their exceptional willingness to share their expertise.

Attached you will find a summary of the survey results. Not each respondent answered every question; therefore, the sample changes from question to question and is so noted. In some cases, respondents offered more than one answer, so percentages do not always equal 100. For each question, the summary answer includes only the statistically significant responses. The number in parentheses represents the raw score.

The answers to each question were tabulated twice, which means that I reviewed each questionnaire at least thirty-two times; in doing so, your various personalities began to emerge, especially since most of the questions were subjective and so many of you supplemented your answers with lengthy comments. Please accept my warmest thanks for your time, your assistance, and for sharing something of your work and yourselves. I have kept track of many of your comments by subject so that I can pass on your exact words -- anonymously -- as I share this information with my college preparatory colleagues.

You are welcome to contact me if you have questions or would like more information.

Sincerely yours,

Susan Altan

Susan Altan
Senior Librarian